

A Publication of  
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Division of Local Services

# City & Town

Amy Pitter, Commissioner • Robert G. Nunes, Deputy Commissioner & Director of Municipal Affairs



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**City & Town** is published by the Massachusetts Department of Revenue's Division of Local Services (DLS) and is designed to address matters of interest to local officials.

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## Assessing DLS Performance in the Certification Process

**Bob Bliss - Regional Manager and Director of Strategic Planning**

The Division of Local Services has completed its second annual survey of assessors whose communities have completed the triennial property valuation certification process. The results show improvement in how assessors viewed the certification process and better communication between assessors and the Bureau of Local Assessment (BLA), but also revealed that some assessors feel BLA could move the process along more quickly.

"DLS is already taking steps to address the length of time required to complete certification," said Bureau Chief Joanne Graziano. "Turnaround time appears to be a major issue cited in the survey comments. We are currently reviewing the various steps and required documentation to continue to streamline and remove any redundancies for FY15, and will present this at the certification workshops" that will take place in early March, she said.

DLS received 67 responses from 113 communities in this year's survey, similar to last year when 69 responses came back from 106 communities.

Asked how they would rate the overall experience with the FY14

certification review process, 15 percent of the respondents said it was "excellent," 49 percent said "good," 17 percent said "average," 12 percent said "difficult" and 6 percent said it was "very difficult." This was in contrast to the FY13 survey, which showed that two-thirds of the responding assessors believed the process could be improved.

Asked of the availability of BLA field advisors, 62 percent said "always available" and 30 percent said "frequently available."

Most respondents (65 percent) found the certification workshops helpful as part of their preparation and 71 percent found the new growth review process either "excellent" (30 percent) or "good" (41 percent).

Of the 42 comments received in the "give us your feedback" question, several reported improvement in BLA's communication style, which was identified as an area of major concern in the FY13 survey.

"The communication between my municipality and DOR/DLS was much better than in the past. I received phone calls in a timely manner with a much more relaxed conversation. I felt that people were much more informative than in the past and were very helpful," said one respondent in the FY14 survey.

Of the 18 comments in the FY14 survey received regarding rating the overall experience in certification review, 10 mentioned a process that takes too long. "My main concern is the times it takes to get certified once the data is submitted to DOR. We submitted the complete package in late August and did not receive certification until Nov. 18, almost three months," wrote one respondent.

Graziano noted that the strengthening of BLA staff with the addition of a second field supervisor and having a full complement of BLA field representatives by early spring should assist the certification process in FY15.

She also observed that the issue of Payment in Lieu of Tax (PILOT) agreements with Solar Electric Generation facilities some communities entered into with limited information in prior years due to the emerging renewable energy market "caused some issues when the PILOTs came under review in certification." This will be addressed this year at the certification workshops, she said.

Your participation in these surveys is vital in DLS identifying issues

and improving our processes. The FY13 survey resulted in DLS fulfilling in its Strategic Plan a commitment to create a certification tab which allowed communities to track their progress through the FY14 certification process. Results from the FY14 assessors' survey will be included in the FY15 DLS Strategic Plan as well. This process of obtaining feedback from stakeholders and then acting on it reflects the DOR360 continuous improvement process through stakeholder engagement.

Thanks to those who took the time to respond. DLS will report back on changes and improvements made as a result of your comments. To read the BLA FY14 survey results in their entirety, click [here](#).

## "Intro to DLS" Video Now Available

*City & Town Editorial Board*

When it comes to municipal finance, the Division of Local Services supports, regulates and interacts with municipalities on a wide variety of subjects, policies and practices. To highlight these efforts, we recently published an introductory video on our website explaining who we are and what we do. The three minute feature is available for viewing on our main landing page along with our previously released videos on the Municipal Databank and our At-A-Glance reports.

Take a look by clicking [here](#). We think you'll give it two thumbs up!

## Ask DLS

This month's *Ask DLS* features a question about billing and abatement due dates. Please let us know if you have other areas of interest or send a question to [cityandtown@dor.state.ma.us](mailto:cityandtown@dor.state.ma.us).

Prompted by the *Ask DLS* topic in [the January 2nd edition of City & Town](#), an official from the Town of Longmeadow asks:

**Are there any consequences to having the due date of February 1st, 2014 printed on actual bills when town offices are not open that day?**

By law the payment and application are due the next business day (2/3/2014 in this example) even if the statutory date of February 1<sup>st</sup> (2/1/2014) appears on the bill. For more information on this topic, please see [the December 5th edition of \*City & Town\*](#). As always, previous editions of *City & Town* covering a wide array of subject matter expertise and analysis can be found online by clicking [here](#).

We'd like to hear from you. Please send any questions you may have to [cityandtown@dor.state.ma.us](mailto:cityandtown@dor.state.ma.us).

## **Governor Patrick Announces \$50M for Comprehensive Climate Change Preparedness Initiatives**

### **Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs**

Governor Deval Patrick recently announced a \$50 million investment for a statewide plan to address the present and future impacts of climate change in Massachusetts. These investments will assess and address vulnerabilities in public health, transportation, energy and the Commonwealth's built environment.

"I believe that we have a generational responsibility to address the multiple threats of climate change," said Governor Patrick. "Massachusetts needs to be ready, and our plan will make sure that we are."

The plan includes a \$40 million municipal resilience grant program, to be administered by the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources (DOER), that will enable cities and towns to harden energy services at critical sites using clean energy technology. The grants will be funded through Alternative Compliance Payments (ACP), which are paid by electric retail suppliers if they have insufficient Renewable or Alternative Energy Certificates to meet their compliance obligations under the Renewable and Alternative Portfolio Standard programs.

The Department of Public Utilities (DPU) will work with utilities to determine ways to accelerate storm hardening and deploy micro-grids and resiliency projects for transmission and distribution. In addition, the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs

(EEA) will establish an inventory of generation facilities vulnerability and preparedness plans.

"Recent storms and related outages serve as a reminder that it is critical we secure our energy grid to endure more extreme weather patterns," said Secretary of EEA Rick Sullivan. "I will work with my team, my colleagues across the Administration and stakeholders to act quickly and responsibly to harden our energy sources."

As a state with a long, densely populated coastline, Massachusetts is particularly vulnerable to sea level rise. The Patrick Administration is investing \$10 million in critical coastal infrastructure and dam repair, including \$1 million in municipal grants offered by the Office of Coastal Zone Management (CZM) to reduce or eliminate risk associated with coastal storms and sea level rise. As natural solutions have often proved to be the best defense against nature, CZM will implement a \$1 million program for Green Infrastructure for Coastal Resilience pilot projects.

Evidence also suggests that public health impacts of climate change will be felt most directly and severely at the local level. To help local boards of health in preparing for the impacts of climate change, the Governor announced that the Department of Public Health (DPH) will develop additional resources at the state level to identify areas of special concern, draft model strategies to address these and enhance education and training. EEA and DPH will partner to conduct analysis on monitoring vector-borne disease in both oysters and mosquitoes. In addition, the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) will work with communities to assess the vulnerability of infrastructure associated with potable water, which is critical to public health and safety.

In addition to the \$40 million in ACP funds and \$10 million in capital funds for coastal projects, the Governor will seek \$2 million in the Fiscal Year 2015 budget to accomplish the remaining interagency efforts.

The Patrick Administration's aggressive clean energy initiatives have made Massachusetts a leader in energy efficiency, renewable energy and emissions reductions. The American Council for an Energy Efficient Economy (ACEEE) has named Massachusetts number one for three years running. This year, Governor Patrick set a new solar goal after reaching the previous goal of 250 megawatts four years early. The Commonwealth now aims to install 1,600 megawatts of solar capacity by 2020. The clean energy revolution is yielding economic benefits as well, with 11.8 percent job growth in the last

year and 24 percent growth in the last two years; nearly 80,000 people are employed in the cleantech industry in Massachusetts.

Many of these investments are happening at the local level, as municipalities, businesses and individuals adopt energy efficiency and renewable energy solutions to reduce energy costs. Today, the Commonwealth is home to 123 cities and towns who have risen to the challenge and met five clean energy criteria therefore earning them the Green Communities Designation.

Municipalities interested in information on DOER grant opportunities can contact Amy McGuire at 617.626.7380 or by email at [amy.mcguire@state.ma.us](mailto:amy.mcguire@state.ma.us).

Communities interested in information on CZM grant opportunities can contact Julia Knisel at 617.626.1191 or by email at [julia.knise1@state.ma.us](mailto:julia.knise1@state.ma.us).

## **Parcel Mapping Enhancement Grants Available for Cities and Towns**

### **Office of Geographic Information (MassGIS)**

MassGIS is funding enhancements to the recently completed assessor map standardization project. Map enhancements would cover content essential for a community's existing operational needs that are currently missing from the standardized mapping. The Bureau of Local Assessment is in support of this project as it will further enhance a valuable resource for assessors. Whether or not your community has a computer mapping capability, you should ask your current mapping provider how this project might benefit your community. For more details on this opportunity, please visit the MassGIS website [here](#).

The deadline to be part of this project is February 7, 2014. Please pass this information to your assessing board or the person or board responsible for maintaining the assessor maps.

## **MMA Conference Information**

The Massachusetts Municipal Association's 35th Annual Meeting and Trade Show is scheduled for Friday, January 24th and Saturday, January 25th. DLS Deputy Commissioner and Director of Municipal Affairs Bob Nunes will host a workshop on Friday afternoon entitled, "State and Local Economic and Budget Outlook" featuring Administration and Finance Secretary Glen Shor and Department of Revenue Commissioner Amy Pitter.

More information on the conference can be found by clicking [here](#). We look forward to seeing you there!

## **January Municipal Calendar**

<b>January 1</b>	<b>Assessors</b>	<b>Property Assessment Date</b>  This is the effective date (not for exemption purposes) for statewide valuation and assessment of all property for the following fiscal year.
<b>January 31</b>	<b>DESE</b>	<b>Notify Communities/Districts of Estimated Net School Spending Requirements for the Next Year</b>  As soon as the Governor releases the ensuing year's budget, DESE notifies communities/districts of the estimated NSS requirements. These figures are subject to change based on the final approved state budget.
<b>Final Day of Each Month</b>	<b>Treasurer</b>	<b>Notification of monthly local aid distribution.</b>  Click <a href="http://www.mass.gov/treasury/cash-management">www.mass.gov/treasury/cash-management</a> to view distribution breakdown.

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